

PRESS RELEASE OF LE-HI-HO AND THE PENNSYLVANIA RURAL GAY CAUCUS

Date: Friday, March 11

Release date: Immediately

Issued by:

Ken Burke

562 Cedar Hill Drive

Allentown, Pa. 18101

264-7770

Chairperson of LE-HI-HO

Chairperson of the Legislative

Committee of the Council

on Sexual Minorities,

an official State Council

Joseph W. Burns

1136 Walnut Street

Allentown, Pa. 18102

437-2642

Co-Chair with Mary Nancarrow

of the Pennsylvania Rural

Gay Caucus

Opposition was expressed today in Allentown to Senate Bill Number 83 now being considered by the State Senate in Harrisburg by Ken Burke, chairperson of the local gay rights organization, LE-HI-HO and Joseph W. Burns, Co-Chair of the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus, a state-wide rights organization which claims the support of Le-Hi-Ho and thirteen other gay organizations located in towns outside of Philadelphia and Allegheny County. Senate Bill Number 83 seeks to prohibit the employment of homosexually inclined persons and those convicted under chapter 31, title 18 of the Revised Criminal Code in state related jobs as prison guards and staff, state police, and in institutions dealing with mentally ill, physically handicapped, or retarded persons. The bill, also, would provide dismissal, fines, and jail for state officials who hire homosexuals for the prohibited positions.

Both LE-HI-HO and the Caucus contend that the bill is discriminatory, an invasion of privacy, and violates the human and civil rights. The same legislation was vetoed last year by Governor Shapp when the Governor described it as the "worst written piece of legislation" he had received in his term as Governor.

"The provision of dismissal and prosecution for hiring practices may be without precedent in the law," said Burke, the LE-HI-HO leader.

"More important," continued Burke, "we are attempting to bring to public attention the costs of this legislation. It is estimated that the price tag of determining the sexuality of every applicant and person employed in these jobs is ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ the millions of dollars. And the results of such investigations would be entirely unsatisfactory. By what measure do you determine homosexual inclinations? Such inclinations, whether acted out or not have affected up to fifty percent of the adult male population at some time, according to the Kinsey studies," he said.

Also, Burke contends, this legislation would affect and apply to employment in most medical facilities in the State, as most facilities are funded in part through grants administered by the state. "Therefore," he says, "the costs of professional training for nurses and staff for persons who cannot obtain employment in their field or for those dismissed must be added to the costs."

Joe Burns, speaking for the Rural Gay Caucus, added, "We believe this legislation to be a ticket for a 'homosexual witch hunt' in government. The results would be ruinous to a few people, but demoralizing and scary to the agencies affected." He thinks that hundreds of gay people have served with quiet competence in these jobs.

Again, speaking for the Caucus, Burns said, "There is no proven relationship between one's sexual orientation or preference and job performance. Nor has any statistic or other evidence been produced to show the need for this legislation. It seems to be the result of a disgusting prejudice."

Both groups will be attending a protest march and demonstration against Senate Bill Number 83 in Harrisburg on Monday, March 14.

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"Beginning at 11:00 A. M.", Burns said, "people from all over the state will be gathering behind the Capitol Building, and at Noon we will be marching to the Capitol steps for the protest. Afterwards, we will be entering the building and spend the rest of the day educating legislators on gay issues."

Both leaders predicted that several hundred people would be attending the rally. Also, they claimed, the protest would be attended by representatives of other groups such as the National Organization of Women, ACLU, and Church groups.

"The support we have been receiving on this issue has been tremendous," said Burns. "I have copies of nearly fifty letters which have been written to the sponsors of this bill, and we think that twice as many have been written and sent.

"This traditional manner of making our views known, however, seems to have no effect, and we are forced to use other methods of bringing our views to the attention of legislators."

The slogan for the protest, Ken Burke pointed out, is "They will never again have the comfort of our silence."

On Thursday, press conferences were conducted in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh among other places by gay leaders, NOW leaders, ad leaders of the ACLU on the Bill.